

STREET PHOTOGRAPHER STEPS 'OUT OF THE SHADOWS'

By [Sherilynn Soo](#)

Feb 7th, 2013 [No Comments »](#)

Vivian Maier's work tells the story of two lives: the life of the subject and the life of the photographer. From the elderly woman laughing with a police officer to the worn down mannequins lying in the street, Maier managed to capture the moments of ordinary life that belong to others and make them a part of her own.

Like many critically acclaimed artists, Maier's work was recognized posthumously—her photographs were discovered in 2007, two years prior to her death. Approximately 100,000 of Maier's photos, most of them negatives, were found in five storage lockers in Chicago, where Maier lived for many years of her life. The collection was sold to a few bidders at a thrift auction house shortly thereafter. This was the first time anyone other than Maier had seen the photos.

By word of mouth her work seemed to gain instant fame.

Art collector Jeffery Goldstein managed to acquire a portion of the original collection and has now dedicated his life to printing Maier's photos and displaying them internationally. Goldstein's share of the collection titled "Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows," is currently on display at Photographic Center Northwest.

"This is the first time Vivian Maier's work is being shown in Seattle. It's a piece of history," said Rafael Soldi, marketing director for Photographic Center Northwest.

In a January 2012 article, the New York Times heralded buyer John Maloof's collection of her work. The Maloof exhibition was on display in New York City last month.

"These two exhibitions nominate a new candidate for the pantheon of great 20th century street photographers," said the New York Times of Maier's photographs.

Soldi expressed similar sentiments.

"The work is very strong," Soldi said. "She was completely uneducated as far as photography goes. To me, it's that thing that you're either born with it or you're not. She was born with an eye that was so sophisticated."

Maier traveled between the United States and France until she settled in Chicago as a live-in nanny for over 40 years. With her basic needs met—food, shelter, an occupation—Maier could walk the streets of Chicago, capturing the images she believed needed preserving. Through the photos taken with her Rolleiflex, people can experience the history and aesthetic of 1960s Chicago through the eyes of an unbiased observer.

For Goldstein, whose team takes care to preserve the authenticity of these photos by using equipment identical to that of Maier's time, Maier's work possesses a unique connection between photographer and subject.

"She's like this potpourri of imagery. She has an incredible sense of empathy with her subjects. They're very nonjudgmental," Goldstein said.

Though Maier was in no way a hermit, it appeared that her ventures into street photography were solo and, except for her employer and a few close friends, she did not have many social ties.

"She's not hemmed in by expectations of any peers or any institutions or any movements of the time," Goldstein said. "The thing that really makes her different is that her photographs, because she shot so much, become like daily journals. You can see what her days were like. She shot a lot of things that we also see around us but we don't think of shooting."

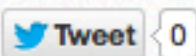
"Out of the Shadows" displays a variety of Maier's photos, organized into chapters based on an identically titled book by Richard Cahan and Michael Williams. The book groups together photos from the collection that have similar themes and then separates those thematic groups into chapters—for instance, the chapter entitled "Walks" stems from the pictures that Maier took on her daily strolls. Within these groups, each photo is simply named, such as "Couple Kissing on the Beach."

One particularly intriguing display in the exhibit is Maier's collection of self-portraits. Many are taken in shop windows and mirrors, her camera at stomach level and her eyes staring intently at her reflection. A few are just shadows, reminding the observer that although she's capturing a moment in the life of something else, it's a moment in her life as well.

With all the attention Maier's photos have received, an important ethical question must be raised: would she have wanted such a private aspect of her life to be so publicly displayed?

"If your decision (as someone who makes art) is that you truly don't want anybody to see your work, it's your job to destroy it before you die," Goldstein said. "And the very fact that she didn't, and that she carefully stored it, says that perhaps she had some hopes that somebody would have some recognition in her life's effort."

Sherilynn may be reached at ssoo@su-spectator.com



Tweet

0



Like

0



+1

0



Submit